

IN THE SPECIFICATION

Please replace the paragraph beginning at line 16 on page 17 with the following:

Al When the simplified average density is smaller than the threshold value ave, a sum S of total density differences of the foregoing sub mask (sub matrix) is computed (S4), and the sum S is compared with a threshold value delta (delta = 150) (S5). When the sum S of total density differences is larger than the threshold value delta, the area is determined as a character area (edge area), and the determination result ~~is~~ remains the same in area determination thereafter (S6). Further, when the area is determined as a character area in S6, a feedback count is increased by "1". The feedback count is compared with a threshold value fb1 when the sum S of total density differences is at the threshold value 'delta' or less in S5 (S7). A threshold value fb1 is provided for determining a degree of the occurrence of a character area in a predetermined history. In the area separation processing, the predetermined history is a previous history of eight pixels and a threshold value fb1 is set at "2"